
Environment Board

14 September 2009

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions

Present

- Chairman:** Cllr Gary Porter (Conservative, South Holland DC)
Vice Chair: Cllr Linda Thomas (Labour, Bolton MBC)
Deputy Chairs: Cllr Mike Haines (Independent, Teignbridge DC); Mayor Dorothy Thornhill (Liberal Democrat, Watford BC)
Conservative: Cllr Peter Britcliffe (Hyndburn BC); Cllr Andrew Gravells (Gloucestershire CC and Gloucester City); Cllr David Potts (South Tyneside MBC); Cllr Clare Whelan (Lambeth LBC); Cllr Jason Stacey (Ealing LBC)
Labour: Cllr Derek Bateman (Cheshire West and Chester Council); Cllr Tony Newman (Croydon LBC); Cllr Ed Turner (Oxford City Council)
Liberal Democrat: Cllr Paula Baker (Basingstoke and Deane BC)
Also present: Sub: Cllr Roger Symonds (Bath and NE Somerset Council); Presenter: Mr Donald Stark (National Significant Infrastructure Division, CLG)
Apologies: Cllr Berni Turner (Liverpool City Council)
LGA Officers: Martin Wheatley; Clive Harris; Phillip Mind; Sarah Richards, (IDeA); Ruth Lucas; Fatima de Abreu

1. Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Porter welcomed new and existing members to the meeting, and expressed the Board's appreciation of the work undertaken by the previous Chairman and Vice-Chair, Cllr Paul Bettison and Cllr Ian Mearns, during their time with the Environment Board.

2. Membership and Terms of Reference 2009/10

Clive Harris introduced the paper, setting out the membership, terms of reference and meeting dates of the Environment Board for the forthcoming year. Cllr Bateman pointed out that his local authority name should read: Cheshire West and Chester Council.

Decisions:

The Board noted this paper and agreed the Terms of Reference.

Actions:

- Amend Cllr Bateman's local authority name to *Cheshire West and Chester Council* on LGA Membership lists. **Fatima de Abreu**

3. Appointments to Outside Bodies

Clive Harris explained to members that the LGA Executive had endorsed a new procedure for LGA appointments to outside bodies. The Board was asked to consider the current list and to make Office Holders aware of their interest in representing the Board externally.

Decisions:

The Board

- noted the paper and
- **agreed** to forward their nominations to Office Holders.

Actions:

- Office Holders to finalise nominations to outside bodies for their respective groups and forward these to officers. **Office Holders**
- Members to feedback on their attendance at outside bodies meetings, and officers to prepare short summary to note at future meetings. **All**
- Add Planning Portfolio Holders to the distribution list of the National Retail Planning Forum **Fatima de Abreu**

4. Overview of LGA work

Martin Wheatley said his paper was intended to set the scene at the beginning of the Board year, and invited feedback from Members at the meeting and otherwise. The discussion was timely because the Group would shortly be embarking on business planning for 2010-11

The Board made the following points:

- Strengthening the flow of information and communication between the group and the sector was important and should be specifically targeted at relevant members and officers (housing portfolio holders for example). Members themselves had a vital role in this;
- Focussing on common ground and sharing information will be essential to maintaining maximum value from available funding;
- There should be a visible emphasis on energy and climate change to match that achieved on housing in recent months

Decisions:

The Board

- endorsed the ongoing work; and

- agreed that a monthly one-page jargon-free bulletin should be distributed to include Leaders, and housing and environment portfolio holders summarising ongoing work and achievements.

Action:

- Progress the programme according to the Board's suggestions
Sarah Richards
- Use available opportunities to promote and use the LGA's research and information within social networks
Members
- Prepare monthly bulletin on a trial basis for the Chairman's approval
Clive Harris

5. Housing: Key Current Issues

Martin Wheatley said that since the report had been circulated, the Homes and Communities Agency had announced 51 bids from councils for new build had been received and that 47 have been successful. The next bidding round closes in late September.

Members discussed the LGA's positioning and tactics on housing finance reform and the deferral of funding for ALMOs announced by the Government in July.

Cllr Stacey said that Ealing LB believed that it would be possible to make a sinking fund for leaseholders work along the lines proposed in the housing finance consultation, contrary to the advice Ruth Lucas had received from officers elsewhere.

Cllr Newman asked whether more could be done by councils to successfully communicate how allocations processes work and what the outcomes are in terms of access to social housing. Cllr Turner asked for an update on LGA's position on Local Housing Allowance.

Cllr Haines said he and Cllr Porter had recently met the Tenant Services Authority and emphasised the need for a proportionate approach to regulation in line with the local performance framework

Decision:

- Members noted and endorsed the recommendations in the report.

Actions:

- Progress policy positions as outlined in the report **Lead Members and officers**
- Provide a list of all successful Local Authority bids for HCA funding

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- Provide name of officer contact in LB Ealing to Ruth Lucas
Caroline Green
Cllr Stacey
- Circulate evidence of impact on leaseholders
Ruth Lucas
- Circulate update on Local Housing Allowance
Mike Heiser
- IDeA to investigate with CIH what practice material is available on communications relating to allocations
Sarah Richards

6. Infrastructure Planning Commission

Philip Mind introduced Donald Stark (CLG) who gave a presentation on the new Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) which will take decisions on major infrastructure projects, and the role of councils in the new system.

Members noted the presentation and raised the following concerns:

- The scale of the resources needed by councils to play their part in the process;
- Would guidance be easily accessible and clear?
- How would enforcement be applied?
- More information was needed on the IPC's decision-making process.

Mr Stark encouraged LGA to make its concerns on resources and other issues known in the current consultation. He notified members that IPC staffing was already in place, with 50 officers in Bristol and it was anticipated that there would probably be around 120 officers in total to support the work of Commissioners.

The Chairman thanked Mr Stark for his presentation and members were invited to contact him directly if they had further concerns or required more information – email: Donald.Stark@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Decision:

- Members noted the presentation and report

Actions:

- Officers to draft a letter from the Board Chairman to the Minister on LGA's concerns about the new arrangements
Phillip Mind
- Circulate presentation and contact details for Donald Stark to the Board
Fatima de Abreu

7. European and International work

Members requested that the work of the European and International Unit be communicated to the Board where relevant.

Cllr Baker was concerned that the item made no mention of the Committee of the Regions, which is the EU assembly of Local and Regional elected members with representatives from all parties and all regions. She asked that the LGA ensure that all relevant networks be linked up.

Decision:

- The Board noted the report and agreed that an update on members' attendance at outside meetings be available as an item on future agendas for noting.

Action:

- Contact members ahead of Board meetings with a request for updates
Fatima de Abreu
- Share information with networks on European and International work
Officers

8. LGA Corporate Environment Policy

Members received this report which set out the background of the policy to improve focus on organisational environmental impact. A number of evaluations by the Carbon Trust had been carried out both on Layden House and Local Government House and targets have been set accordingly.

Members said they would like to test the ambition of the plan, for example whether there could be a more ambitious target for recycling than the current 50% proposed. The Board should play a role in championing LGA Group's own environmental performance, while acknowledging that formal responsibility rests with the Executive and Boards of Group bodies.

The Chairman suggested that the Environment Board could act in a scrutiny role. Cllr Bateman reminded members of a previous report received by them on progress at Local Government House..

Decision:

- The Board noted the report and **agreed** that the subject should be discussed in greater detail at a future meeting.

Action:

- Arrange for responsible officers to attend and present at January Board meeting
Clive Harris

9. Update on other Board Business

Members noted the report.

10. Decisions and Actions from previous meeting

Members agreed the note of the last meeting.

Members expressed their regret at the very sad news that Professor John Chesshire, who chaired the LGA's Climate Change Commission in 2007, had recently died. Martin Wheatley paid tribute to the work of Sarah Richards who would be leaving IDeA to move to Essex Council.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 5 November 2009 at Local Government House

Please note that the Office Holder Meeting – 9am, and Political Group Meetings – 10am, will also be held at the above address.